

THE MASTER

Drawings by W. Pryor

By WILLIAM BROWN MELONEY

HOLD on here a second, Pericles!" With that John Laysan darted across California street, leaving his big, bronzed partner in the West Coast Wrecking & Salvage Company somewhat surprised and standing alone beside the red ninety horsepower juggernaut in which they had just arrived in front of the Merchants' Exchange.

And Pericles did not see that a newsstand on the opposite sidewalk was Laysan's objective; for, as he turned to discover what had taken his partner off so suddenly, his gray eyes picked up his ancient enemies, Nils Nilsen and Simon Rosenthal, emerging in haste from the exchange into the sunlight of the June midday.

As usual Nilsen's big chin was down on his chest and his round, yellow head thrust forward bullishly in the manner that had earned him his sobriquet of Nils the Bull Necked. And as usual whenever these two appeared abroad together, Nils was leading the way and Simon trailing at his heels like a Chinese wife.

But what held Pericles O'Brien's gaze was Rosenthal's paleness. A hue of wood ashes rode the full-moon countenance that was noted for its floridity. A greenish tinge ringed the black, toy-rabbit eyes. It became more than a tinge as Simon, with a mechanical nod, recognized the wrecker, hesitated, and then rolled on down California street in Nils' wake. At Liedesdorff street, a hundred feet to the east of the exchange entrance, a passing wagon halted Nilsen and enabled Rosenthal to overtake him. Simon reached up and said something to the bull-necked one. Thereat Nilsen sent a furtive glance backward, discovered Pericles looking straight at him, and, with a shake of his head at Simon and, if anything, holding it lower than ever, plunged on his way.

UP to some new deviltry, that pair, and Rosey's scared stiff, Pericles was reflecting when Laysan, holding out a magazine, appeared round the end of the car.

"Here y'are, old man," said he. "Here are that woman's pictures I was telling you about last night. Now see for yourself if they're not the real thing."

"If they are," laughed Pericles, "they're the first I've ever seen in any of these magazines that had anything of the sea in 'em. And, with one or two exceptions, the so-called sea stories are no better,—a lot of alleged nautical gibberish for a background and a crew of farmers that never drew a human breath for characters. You know—" As he had been speaking he had been opening the magazine, and there he paused in wide-eyed admiration of a full-page color drawing entitled "The Trades,"—a driving clipper ship under all sail. Holding it from him he exclaimed, "Look out, John, or she'll run us down!" and verily the clipper seemed to be leaping out of its frame. A second drawing showed a steamer, evidently a liner, pounding to pieces on the surging white reef of a high-peaked tropical island. "Fanged" was its title. Pericles looked up from this to say, "Hits you somewhere inside, this one. Sad, lonely, isn't it?"

"It pulls," assented Laysan; "but look at this one, 'The Master,'" and eagerly he helped Pericles turn to a drawing that showed a section of the bridge of a big liner in a storm.

The moment was one of supreme danger. The ship was being hove to. Calm and certain her yellow-skinned commander was standing up to windward, his face to the blast, and his eyes following the swing of his vessel's head. One hand was outstretched in the act of conveying an order to an officer in tense poise at an engine-room telegraph. To leeward of this figure were two more officers; but, like the one at the telegraph, they had no eyes for ship nor smothering sea. It was the commander who held their combined gaze; and that gaze, pregnant of faith and reliance, said, "This is the master!"

"Great!" was Pericles' verdict. "That's the sea as it is, John—the spirit of it! Can't believe, though, a woman did these pictures. It'd take a man to know the sea like—" Pericles paused and, reddening, lifted his gaze to discover his partner studying him with a quizzical air. "Say, John, this remind you of anybody?" he asked, indicating the central figure in "The Master."

"Remind me of anybody?" chortled Laysan. "Why, it's you and nobody else, you big pirate! Whoever Marian Craig is, it's you she has put on that bridge, or I'm a chimpanzee! Now who's Marian Craig? Come on and 'less up!"

"Marian Craig?" repeated Pericles blankly, and then for the first time reading the name signed to the drawings, "Why, I—" Tucking the magazine into an arm-



"And jes' think a woman did 'em!"

pit, he brought a letter out of an inside pocket, and as Laysan glimpsed its Glasgow postmark and the angular handwriting of the address he knew it to be from Mrs. Willie Faulkner—Helen Muir that was—who owed the great happiness of her life to this partner of his. "Why, John, this is the girl that Helen Faulkner's been writing about," and he passed the letter to Laysan,—"young American artist whose work's been making the biggest kind of a hit in Paris and London. But how the devil could she get me like that? She has never seen me."

Smiling to himself and leading the way into the exchange, John Laysan was reading:

Marion Craig knows the sea as you know it, Pericles. But more than just being a wonderful artist she is a wonderful woman; indeed, one of the finest characters I have ever known. Some day I hope you may meet and know—

THERE Laysan paused and looked up. They had come to the threshold of the black-boarded chamber where San Francisco keeps records of all that's well or ill on the Seven Seas, and Pericles was pushing open the swinging doors.

"Helen Faulkner'll marry you off yet, old top," Laysan was saying, when a muttered exclamation from Pericles sent his gaze across the floor.

On a blackboard that was reserved for only the most momentous tidings a red-headed clerk on a step ladder was that instant finishing in foot-high letters the heading **DISASTER**.

A crowd, with eyes only for that direful word and what the bulletin writer's flying fingers immediately began to post beneath it, was gathering from every part of the chamber:

SEATTLE, JUNE 18.—Wireless received here 11:30 A.M. this date from steamer Kodiak, Wrangell, Alaska, for Seattle, says: "Alaskan Northern Line steamship Seminole, from Skagway June 12, and Juneau June 13, carrying three million and a half bullion and gold dust, for San Francisco, struck uncharted rock Clarence Strait morning June 14. Sank fifteen minutes afterward. Kodiak has on board 219 survivors of total company 220. Survivors landed own boats Lake Bay, Prince of Wales Island. Assisted by trading sloop, Captain Peabody, of Seminole, returned immediately by sloop scene wreck. Kodiak called and sailed Lake Bay June 16. Nothing had been heard up to then Peabody. Kodiak passed near supposed scene of wreck. Saw no signs. Found only deep water."

"Three million and a half! Jumping Jehoshaphat!" exclaimed Laysan as the final word of the bulletin leaped into view.

Followed a deep silence for the space of a second, and then arose a murmur of voices like the overtone of the sea. It might have been the excited and suspicious hour again in the previous December when the

news had come through of the piling up of the Tikvah ex Nanaimo, the ship out of which Pericles O'Brien long before had stepped into his first fame as a sea master. The buzzing crowd began dissolving into the quick elements of a shipping world that must needs take account of these tidings. And as they went scurrying off in varying directions to find 'phones or telegraph stations their voices were lifted in translation of the facts underlying the disaster:

The Seminole was not an Alaskan Northern liner, but one of the Gold Coast Steamship Company's fleet; in other words, a Nilsen & Rosenthal vessel. N. & R. had purchased her on the Delaware and brought her round the Horn in the preceding winter, following the wreck of the Tikvah on the lower Mexican Coast. The day she had put her fiddle-head bows through the Heads the Alaskan Northern Line, cramped for tonnage, had chartered her. Despite the vicissitudes of twenty-five years, she had still retained a good many of the qualities of the heyday time when she had been famous among transatlantic ferry queens. This was her second or third trip under that charter.

"Well?" demanded Laysan in a didn't-I-tell-you-long-ago sort of tone and turning his back on the bulletin board to look up into his partner's serious face.

Apparently Pericles did not hear him. He was re-scanning the news from Seattle, word by word and line by line, and he could not help imagining that in the spaces here and there the scared, white face of Simon Rosenthal was playing peckaboo with him.

"Well, old man, what if you make of it?" asked Laysan in a louder tone. "I should say that something pretty rotten has happened in Denmark!"

"I think, John, we'd better cut luncheon uptown today and get back to the office," was Pericles' answer, and he put an arm through Laysan's and started streetward, describing as they went how a little while before he had seen Nilsen and Rosenthal hurrying out of the exchange. They had their offices in the building. They had left it before the posting of the bulletin of the Seminole's loss, and so, argued Pericles, they must have received earlier advices.

"Just about two or three months earlier," was Laysan's caustic comment.

INSIDE that hour William Graves, president of the Alaskan Northern Line, and Pericles and Laysan were closeted in the private office of the West Coast Wrecking & Salvage Company, poring over a chart of Alexander Archipelago, the island-scattered extremity of Southeastern Alaska.

"Somewhere in there she must have struck," Graves was saying, indicating a cluster of islets where Zarembo